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Eymen Homsi has degrees in architecture from the Ohio State University and biology/botany from the University of Southern Colorado. He taught design and theory at the Ohio State University (1991–99), worked at the Atelier Jose Oubrerie (1991–1995), and was Director of Design at the Columbus Neighborhood Design Centre (1998–99), where he designed the Salvation Army Transitional Housing, Friends of the Homeless Dormitory, and other public projects. He established Studio Noni in Helsinki (2000–04) for experimental projects, speculative works, competitions. He was coordinator of Habitation Studio at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2004–09). He returned to Istanbul in 2009 after an absence of thirty five years to teach studio at Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts (2009–10). Currently he teaches studio at Istanbul Technical University, and theory at Kültür University. His research concerns the relationship between rites of worship in Islam and the space of the mosque.

GENUFLECTION AND EMPIRE

Genuflection always accompanies Empire, as evidenced by some of the earliest wall carvings of prostrating supplicants. Knee-bending survives in many forms (e.g. curtsy and obeisance), testifying to the continued importance of ritual and myth in our time. But genuflection is never neutral: dressage is extreme genuflection. The types of genuflection that have survived the transition to globalization all reflect our unease with questions of divinity, class, nationality, and territory. Today's most visible and politically charged form of genuflection is the ritual of Islamic worship.[1] The image of prostrating Moslems has become emblematic of the push and pull of late capitalism, a symptom of passage to Empire, as Hardt and Negri would put it.[2] For the individual worshiper the spiritual aspect may yet endure—genuine introspection doubtlessly continues to exist—but at the collective level, and in the context of Empire, it is the question of power that becomes significant.

The rite has come down to us intact after 1400 years, though its origins are probably much older. An archaic ritual of the pastoral age has suddenly appeared as a propaganda tool in our midst. It is paradoxical that this most inward and private of rituals should have far reaching communal and political dimensions. In itself, as a set of gestures, it is 'smooth', neutral and borderless, but as a contemporary ritual it represents a key ideological struggle of our time. When wor-

1 Annmarie Schimmel: *Deciphering the Signs of God: a Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). p. 172 fn 43, cites the basic works on ritual prayer: Friedrich Heiler (1923): *Das Gebet*; Constance E. Padwick (1960): *Muslim Devotions*; E.E. Calverley (1925): *Worship in Islam*.

2 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 2001), p. 137–153.

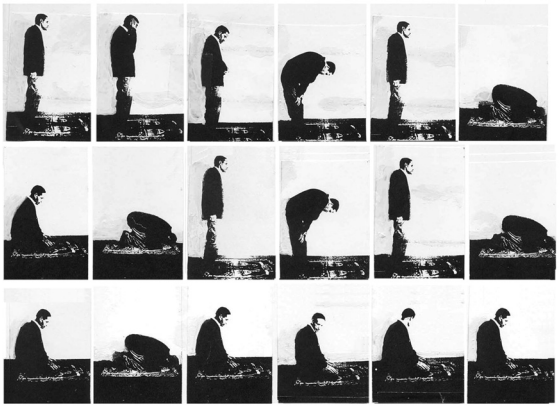

Fig. 1: Gestures of worship.

shipers align themselves on the invisible spokes of a universal circle centered on Mecca, they help establish the *Dar al Islam*, the 'domain of Islam', a territorial and spatial entity whose logic and aspirations are global, and therefore in direct challenge to those of Empire. (It was already a significant political gesture 1400 years ago when the direction of the original alignment changed from Jerusalem to Mecca.) The communal aspect of the ritual is most visible at noon prayer on Fridays, the public face of Islam, when worshipers are seen to perform in coordinated and reinforced unison.[3] Even when the ritual is performed in solitude, it is coordinated precisely with the invisible others. The certainty that many others are aligned along the same network, performing the same genuflections at the same time and reciting identical phrases, magnifies the effect and monumentalizes the gestures. Ritual genuflection thus superimposes on everyday space a worldwide web of territorial and visual control, a virtual network that, five times a day, reassembles dispersed locations, activates dormant axes, renders ordinary space sacred, and makes every location potentially Islamic. This system of alignment accompanies the horizon everywhere, providing a simple and effective way of striating the globe. It is easy to see how such a system can have important political consequences today. On one level it functions to subjectify and subjugate, to proselytize, to observe, chaperone and enforce communal, patriarchal and masculine identity, both within the domain of Islam and without. The collective control of bodies in space reinforces ideology in explicit ways, as, for instance, through the displacement of women to the back of the space. On another level the ritual may have revolutionary potential, a capacity to subvert the sovereignty of Empire.

And yet, despite its apparent power, this network of spatial domination and command is unstable and under threat. It is the familiar story of how the destruc-

3 "A bird's eye view of the Moslem world at the hour of prayer…would present the spectacle of a series of concentric circles of worshippers radiating from the Ka'bah at Makkah and covering an ever-widening area from Sierra Leone to Malaysia and from Tobolsk to Capetown." Hitti, Philip K.: *History of the Arabs*, 10th edition, with a preface by Walid Khalidi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 130.

tion of place-making memory has eroded the mythical underpinnings that held the center in place. The disappearing horizon, as described by Paul Virilio, spells a lingering and trivial death.[4] We witness, for example, the dilemma of the first Moslem Astronaut, Sheik Muszaphar Shukor of Malaysia, as to which direction he should face while praying in the Soyuz-TMA capsules.[5] In what follows I will speculate on the relationship of the ritual to conceptions of space in Islam in three phases: early nomadic, middle imperial, and late global. I will suggest that the ritual fosters habits of body alignment, restriction of vision, willful disregard of visual space and control of territory that serve to reinforce the ethos of Empire.

Early Nomadic

A character in Balzac's *A Passion of the Desert*, a soldier in Napoleon's Egyptian campaign, exclaims in fear and awe: "In the desert, don't you see, there is everything and there is nothing… it is God, but without mankind."[6] An allied soldier in today's Iraq or Afghanistan might echo the sentiment. Monotheism is born out of a confrontation with the threatening void of the desert.[7] The desert, as a metaphor for solitude, absence and estrangement, *has* to be filled with lines and figures. The void must be overcome, nomadic flow channeled, organized, measured. One can imaginatively read the prostrating figures as compensating for the featureless horizontality of the ground. 'Smooth' space has to become 'striated', to borrow Deleuze and Guattari's insightful distinction.[8]

In the case of Islam, the striation of the desert begins by marking the one point on the horizon that aligns with Mecca. From an infinite number of trajecto-

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4 "The loss of the horizon-line of geographical perspective imperatively necessitated the establishment of a substitute horizon: the artificial horizon of a screen or monitor, capable of permananetly displaying the new preponderance of the media perspective over the immediate perspective of space." Paul Virilio: *The Information Bomb*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2000), p. 14.

5 Patrick di Justo: "A Muslim Astronaut's Dilemma: How to Face Mecca From Space," *Wired Blog*, entry posted 26 Sept, 2007, http://www.wired.com/science/space/news/2007/09/mecca_in_orbit, (accessed June 28, 2009).

6 Quoted in Christian Jambet: *Le Caché et l'Apparent* (Paris: l'Herne, 2003), p. 33, my translation.

7 "It was said of Abbot Agatho that for three years he carried a stone in his mouth until he learned to be silent." quoted in Thomas Merton: *The Wisdom of the Desert* (London: Sheldon Press, 1960), p. 30.

8 On Deleuze and Guattari's conception of smooth and striated space see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 474–500.

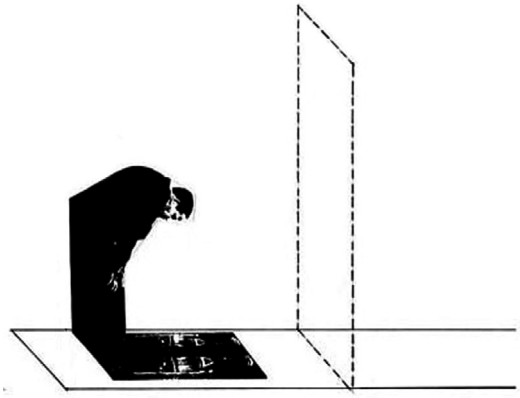

Fig. 2: Facing the sutra.

ries crisscrossing the surface, one is made significant by the authority of the One God, while the others recede in importance. The gaze and body are thus oriented towards this privileged *qibla*, from the root word in Arabic for 'facing', 'moving towards', or 'direction'.[9] It represents the symbolic threshold of the invisible realm, being the point where earth and sky meet. Worshipers experience it tangibly, perhaps not unlike the way mariners experience crossing the Meridian. It tugs on the body, and eventually brings it in pilgrimage to the center and down on its knees in genuflection. As a non-dimensional point, it is reductive, conservative, unitary and authoritarian. To face it in worship is the symbolic equivalent of devout practice, correct attitude, proper orientation, and the "straight path" of religious life. The line of the horizon, by contrast, stands for the opposite metaphor of mobility and freedom, and represents the smooth, unimpeded space of the nomad. It is the *qibla* which triumphs in this opposition, as it must if imperial authority, hierarchy, and organized religion are to be established. The point divides the line, defines its center, delimits its extension, and in so doing begins the process of transforming the free space of the pastoral nomad into the segmented space of the sedentary farmer.

The elemental clash of point and line, of focus and extension, singularity and multiplicity, is reenacted in the first gestures of the ritual. Proper alignment is insufficient in itself to domesticate the infinite horizon, for no sooner has the *qibla* been established than that it recedes along with the receding horizon. So a second striation is needed to secure the first, and it comes in the form of a mental/visual operation in which the worshiper evokes an imaginary screen and places it at two paces ahead. This cross-axial *sutra*, from the root word for 'hidden' or 'veiled', symbolically erases profane space beyond itself for the duration of the ritual. It reflects the gaze backwards and downwards, reinforcing the meaning of Islam as 'submission' by showing regard to the ground and disregard for vis-

9 For the origins of the *Qibla*, and Islamic spatiality see Dominique Clevenot: *Une Esthéthique du Voile: Essai sur l'Art Arabo-Islamic* (Paris: l'Hatmattan, 1994), pp. 17–22.

ible space.[10] The worshiper thus stands bounded in a sanctified bubble organized along the three primordial axes: the *qibla* axis, the vertical axis-mundi, and the cross-axial *sutra* screen. Movement is fixed in place as an oscillation between the divine vertical and the terrestrial horizontal. The vast space of the horizontal plane is delimited, measured, localized, made tangible by the outline of the prayer rug as a personal temenos, and the mosque as its communal form.

The alignment of the body with the *qibla* and the restriction of the gaze through the *sutra* become concretized, are made physical, in the form of the mosque's '*qibla* wall', a long liturgical wall placed perpendicularly to the *qibla* axis, i.e. oriented parallel to the horizon that faces Mecca. The wall can be read as a materialized, collective *sutra*, shielding the row of worshipers from profane space. Worshipers face it in rows, standing shoulder to shoulder in a manner that is said to reflect the habits of nomads accustomed to facing wide horizons and resistant to confinement and hierarchy. The physical wall thus evokes the horizon, equalizes the relation between worshipers, and embodies the male community and its mechanisms of domination and control. Successive rows reinforce the striation and codify the system of limits and visual controls in a reversal of the original motivation for unlimited space and free movement. A new precinct is thus established behind the wall in which the visual world is erased and the distance to the centre is collapsed. The cross-axial organization finds its architectural expression in the elongated form of early hypostyle mosques. A typical example, such as the Ummayad Mosque of Damascus (706–715 ca), has the main entrance on the long side of its rectangle, monumentalizing the *qibla* wall, abruptly interrupting vision and rendering the space shallow. The *qibla* wall, as a vestigial memory of the horizon shows that, despite having left the desert and acquired the requisite urban luxuries and institutions, the memory of the menacing void remains, to be expressed in artistic endeavors and spiritual disciplines. A similar sensibility governs the production of early *Qurans* in *Kufic* script, whose wide pages require the head to turn while reading, thus enhancing the monumentality of the text and formalizing even the smallest gestures in the service of authority and sovereignty.

Striation of the body complements and reinforces that of the ground. The opposition of smooth and striated, which for the horizon was a question of extension/focus, and for the *qibla* wall was a question of passage/barrier, becomes

10 For the esoteric meaning of ritual prayer in Islam see Schimmel, pp. 148–155; also Henry Corbin: *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn'Arabi*. trans Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), Chapter V, "Man's Prayer and God's Prayer".

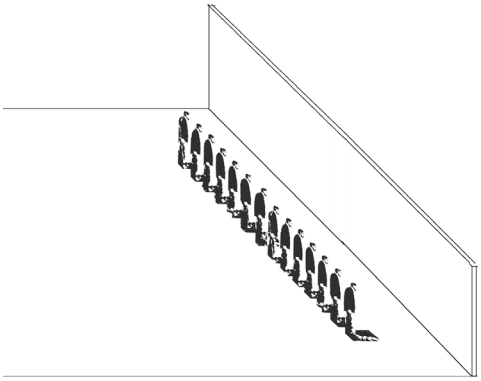

Fig. 3: Facing the qibla Wall.

for the body a question of movement/stasis. Points of arrival replace Bedouin lines of mobility. Movement in the vertical is reduced until the forehead touches the ground and complete cessation is achieved in the horizontal. By degree the worshiper descends to the ground in an act of submission, gaining a measure of immortality by touching the ground in genuflection.[11] The descent consists of sets of formal genuflection, *rukaa*, performed in five daily regimens, starting with the standing position, the vertical datum of the ritual, followed by the half prostration (the body momentarily triangulated), followed by the full prostration (the body in a nearly fetal position that represents perhaps a symbolic death). In the process the eye travels from full space in the vertical to flat space in the half prostration (the eye suspended and looking down) to no space in the fetal position. The restoration of vision comes with a final gesture, where the head, with eyes open, turns from the right to the left shoulder in salutation to the companion angels, visually sweeping the length of the *qibla* wall and symbolically reconciling good and evil. The ritual concludes in the seated position where the ground plane is experienced bodily, its dimensions internalized.

Middle Imperial

Individual genuflection is spiritual technology, but collective genuflection is biopower, the mechanism of (modern) subjugation and subjectification.[12] Remote control and persuasion become more systemic in the layout of imperial spaces. Istanbul's Suleymaniye mosque (completed in 1557 ca) is a machine for the bio-striation of space. It gradually compresses the traversing body: slowing it down to sanctify it in the ablution forecourt, stopping it in the worship hall, and compacting it in the cemetery. Thus the three main spaces on the *qibla* axis can be said to correspond

11 For the esoteric meaning of invisibility in Islam see Toshihiko Izutsu: *Sufism and Taoism, a Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1984), p. 48.

12 See note 2, pp. 22–27.

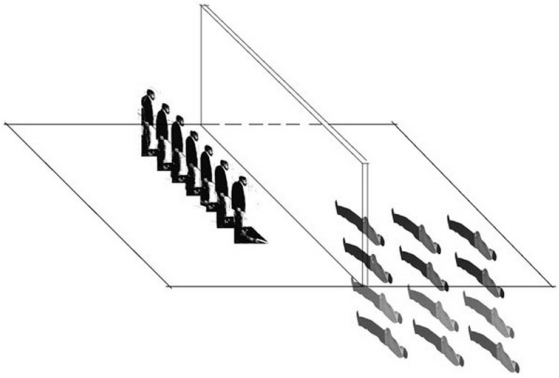

Fig. 4: Facing Mecca underground.

to the three postures of standing, half prostration, and full prostration. The trajectory of worshiper goes symbolically and actually from the city to the cemetery, the body repeatedly facing the *qibla* wall as a barrier until such a day that it becomes a passage. The characteristic stillness of the space of the mosque is the analogue to the immobility of the body. It is the final result of the devolution of movement started outside. The control of bodies extends below ground to the alignment of corpses, the dead constituting a separate but adjacent realm to the living. They are interred in rows parallel to the rows of worshipers. Their heads are made to turn towards the *qibla* in a last gesture similar to the concluding salutation. Their underground eyes are thus set to face Mecca on the Day of Judgment. The necks of both the living and the dead crane in anticipation of a promised reconciliation at the end of time, when distance collapses and space flattens.[13] The analogy is never more explicit than in the Suleymaniye, where the cemetery and worship hall mirror each other perfectly, being identical in size, alignment and shape, divided by the *qibla* wall into two gardens, one carpeted and the other floral. The worship hall pairs the earth and sky, with the cemetery on one side and the void between the four minarets above the ablution forecourt on the other.

But to overemphasize the striation and immobility of the body is to overstate the case. Deleuze and Guattari repeatedly point out that the "the simple opposition 'smooth-striated' gives rise to far more difficult complications, alternations, and superpositions."[14] The ritualistic body is divided in its loyalties. Its vertical stance expresses authority and hierarchy, but its descent returns it to the 'plane of immanence. The immediacy and intimacy of the ground challenges the singularity of the vertical, bringing into play the oppositions of optic/haptic and distant/close vision. The "descent"(*tanziil*) of the Word is the founding moment of

13 Quran, sura 78:20, sura 77:10.

14 See note 8, p. 480. Hardt and Negri describe a related overlap but in another context when they refer to the formation of Empire as being one of "mixed constitution." See note 2, pp. 304–324.

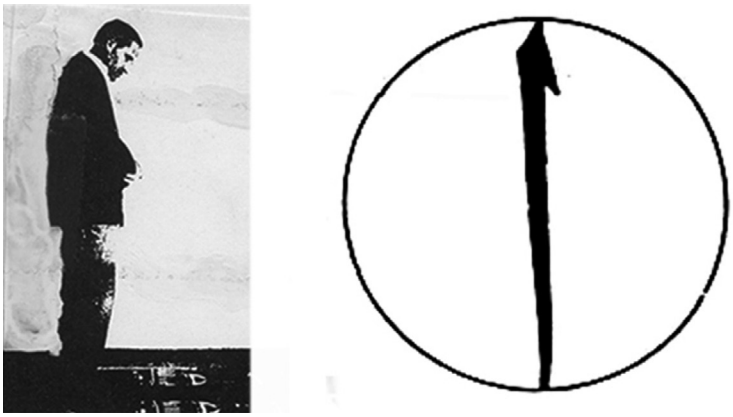

Fig. 5: Alif in Muhaqaq script.

Islam, the transcription on the plane of human action of the "Preserved Tablets", kept at the apex and containing the totality of all that exists.[15] Thus to stand in worship is to align oneself with the transcendent vertical, while to genuflect (or recite/inscribe the *Quran*) is to transmute the timeless into the time-bound. The alternations and superpositions are exemplified in the affinity between script and gesture. The Alif, the carrier of sovereign and religious authority, the datum of the alphabet, the primordial line, here descends into contingent time, to be followed by the other letters dissipating along the horizontal line, becoming talismans that restore life to the cold hierarchy of the vertical.[16] This is made explicit in Bin Muqla's *Muhakak* script, where the vertical Alif is rendered to evoke a standing worshiper whose neck is slightly bent in an attitude of humility.[17] It would seem that Bin Muqla's alphabet was playfully subversive and dissenting, not only for evoking the forbidden human figure, but also for playing up the humble multitude of letters as against the sovereign vertical. The analogy further extends from the page to the realm of living space: many of the same verses and key words being silently recited also happen to be inscribed on the surfaces of the space of worship in a paradoxical change of state, as if liquid became solid. They accompany and compliment the oscillations between the vertical and horizontal, and reinforce the relationship of gesture, Word and space.[18]

15 Quran Sura 85:21-22 and Sura17:145 for mention of the Eternal Tablets. The first word of the first revelation, 'Read', (the source word for Koran) unites the celestial axis with the horizontal page.

16 A folk parable tells of how the Alif was the first among the assembly of letters to prostrate in worship and how God rewarded its devotion by restoring it to its original and ideal—that is vertical—shape while the others letters remained in the form of their prostration. God also placed the Alif at the head of the assembly of letters and at the head of his own name and that of man (Allah and Adam).

17 Seyyed Husein Nasr*: Islamic Art and Spirituality* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 19–21. The Muhakkak style was invented in Baghdad by the calligrapher Bin Muqla (d. 939), and still in general use today.

18 Furthermore, the letters are not simply attached one to another, but 'placed' in function of each other and the horizontal line, the form of each changing according to its position in the

The alternations and superpositions likewise constitute imperial mosques. The centralized and domed Suleymaniye retains, a thousand years after the nomadic phase, a cross-axial striation that modulates the advance of axial space in pronounced and significant ways. The *qibla* wall appears flatter than the other three walls; lateral compression is present; the forecourt is wider than it is long; many important entrances into the precinct occur along the cross axis; the east and west outer buttresses divide the form laterally.[19] Though monumental, the building responds to the intimate gestures of worship, themselves acts of homage to the smooth space of the desert, the primordial 'body without organs'. The vitality and multiplicity of genuflecting figures contrast with the timelessness and immobility of the space, where neither movement nor shadows are registered (the carpet absorbing all sound and the colored glass filtering all light), where all trajectories are equal in the uniform space, and where every spot can confer stasis and centrality. The removal of shoes lends intimacy and domesticity to the monumental space. It is perhaps in this sense that Deleuze and Guattari write of Arab architecture (and Moslem by extension) that it "begins very near and low, placing the light and the airy below and the solid and heavy above. This reversal of the laws of gravity turns lack of direction and negation of volume into constructive forces."[20]

Late Global

It's a long way from the liturgical wall of 8th Century Damascus to the wall of security monitors in the control room of the Hajj, the annual rite of pilgrimage to Mecca, one of today's largest mass gatherings and most extensive crowd-control operations. The striating element moves to an entirely different register here: instrumental, impersonal, systematic, invisible. The habits of communal alignment, of limiting view, compressing the body, appropriating the horizon, and virtualizing space all find their place in the service of this new panopticon. In this instrument of mass security it is the collective rather than the introspective that becomes significant. All the factors contributing to globalization come to view on the wall: immigration, spectacle, fundamentalism, authoritarianism, the multitude, single world advertising, etc. The screen is a new collective *sutra*, but now as a means of external control. The crowd-control room is the active mechanism at the center

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sequence and so requires kinetic and sculptural choices to be made. Likewise, the worshiper's choice of recited texts determines the length, rhythm, pacing, and internal meaning of the ritual. As the forehead finally touches the ground, so the inscription finds its balance along the line.

19 Godfrey Goodwin: *A History of Ottoman Architecture* (London: Thames &Hudson, 1992), pp. 215–239.

20 See note 8, p. 494.

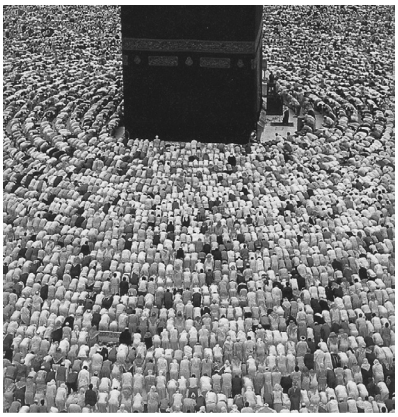

Fig. 6: Kaaba in Mecca.

of vision, competing with the *Kaaba* at the hub of worship. The wall is instrumental both practically and politically-ideologically. Millions of pilgrims are made to move, and therefore genuflect, in an ordered fashion according to techniques developed for football matches.[21] This is one segment of Empire's extensive system of control that goes far beyond mere pilgrimage.

All the striating lines converge in obeisance at the *Kaaba*, the extraordinary cube at the center of visual and spatial control. Mythic origins enhance its transcendental power.[22] "The great monuments rise up like levees" says Bataille, "opposing the logic of majesty and authority to any confusion: Church and State in the form of cathedrals and palaces speak to the multitude, or silence them."[23] But the *Kaaba* is an unusual monument in that it remains invisible at the center of vision, a blind panopticon shrouded in a black vesture (*kiswa*), absorbing all light and space and prayer.[24] Its invisibility reinforces the suppression of vision (e.g. veils, genuflections, courtyard houses, decorated surfaces, ban on figural representation, etc.). It contains no icons of veneration, no striating object; it merely points to an absence. It is believed to be the lowest in a stack of celestial cubes, functioning as a relay point between the cosmic axis and the axes of terrestrial worship.[25] It is simultaneously of this world and otherworldly, appearing to be ter-

21 Crowd Dynamics: "Ministry of Haj workshop: Jamarat Bridge Saudi Arabia 2001–2005," updated 23 May 2009, http://www.CrowdDynamics.co.uk/, (accessed June 28, 2009).

22 It is believed to have been built by Adam after the Expulsion, and later again by Abraham in his desert wanderings. Its Black Stone, an ancient and sacred meteorite, is believed to have been brought down from one of the celestial sphere by the archangel Gabriel. For an account of the origins of Islamic pilgrimage, and a description of its stages and procedures see Ibn Warraq: *Why I Am Not a Moslem* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1995), pp. 34–41.

23 Quote in Dennis Hollier: *Against Architecture: the Writings of George Bataille* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press 1989) p. IV, trans. Betsy Wing of Bataille text.

24 A new *Kiswa* is woven every year to replace the old one. The habit of draping the Ka'ba might have its origins in pre-Islamic Arabia, with its tradition of draping epic poems (called the 'mual-lakaat--those that hang) from the Ka'ba during market and pilgrimage periods.

25 See K. A. C. Creswell: *A Short Account of Early Moslem Architecture* (Aldershot: Scolar

restrial, like the receding *qibla*, almost available, potentially intimate. This paradox of remote intimacy, of vision (and understanding) touching at a great distance but without attainment describes well the abstract quality of the God of Islam. And yet this invisible and small edifice controls a radiating network of formidable monuments.[26] To worship along its axis is to turn away from everyday space and occupy one end of an opposition: the sophisticated mosque and the elemental cube, architecture and proto-architecture, development and origin, the time-bound and the timeless. Deleuze and Guattari describe the power of the center thus: 'the absolute itself can appear in the Encompassed, but only in a privileged place well delimited as a center, which then functions to repel beyond the limits anything that menaces the global integration.[27]

But Empire is without center or periphery, and therefore indifferent to the architectural subtleties of monument and center. It challenges Islam exactly at its center, by erecting a monument of its own that dwarfs the *Kaaba*. The Abraj-al-Bait mall/hotel development, when completed in 2010, will be the largest single building in the world, at 1.5 million square meters (having started in 2002, in the interval between 9/11 and Iraq II). It will house 100,000 people and contain all the requisite elements of global commerce (complete with Tiffany's, Starbucks, and H&M).[28] The audacity of placing it precisely here, at the point of greatest friction and proximity, exposes the raw and insatiable power of Empire. Here the passage to Empire appears not as the subtle and seamless structural transformation described by Hardt and Negri's, but as something altogether more archetypal and primitive, a crude battle in the mold of earlier empires. The two monuments abut each other but are worlds apart, representing diametrically opposed ways of persuasion and control. The juxtaposition exposes a simmering hostility, the uncanny moment before a disaster. (Evidently, high-end design is also needed in the mix of monument and multitude, if one is to believe the rumored involvement of Norman Foster and Zaha Hadid in the design of a new urban plan for Mecca and the

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Press, 1989), pp. 3–4. See also Titus Burckhardt: *Art of Islam, Language and Meaning*. Translated by J. Peter Hobson (Westyerham, Kent: The World of Islam Festival Publishing Co. Ltd.,1976), pp. 3–5.

26 The Suleymaniye, again as one example among many, registers the magnetic pull of the Kaaba in the apparent advance of its formidable main volume up the hill and past the four minarets.

27 Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 494.

28 Hassan M. Fattah: "The Profane Crowding Out the Sacred in Mecca," New York Times, March 8, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/08/world/africa/08iht-mecca.4842728.html, (accessed June 28, 2009).

Fig. 7: Abraj al Bait, Mecca, 2002-09.

expansion of the *Kaaba* mosque, following on the earlier Bin Laden expansions).[29] The new Abraj building has all the credentials of Empire, down to the identity of its developer, the Saudi Binladin Group, the corporate name of the less well know half of the family.[30] The two halves constitute the symmetrical bookends of Empire. The symmetry is necessary if one accepts Hardt and Negri's formulation by which Empire-construction requires real or manufactured enemies. The new barbarians at the gate serve only to consolidate and strenghthen the system. Terrorism becomes as necessary to the machinery of Empire as global capital. Hardt and Negri designate both postmodernism and fundamentalism as 'symptoms of passage'. They observe that the discourses of postmodernism and fundamentalism appeal respectively to the winners and the losers in the process of globalization. Already in the 14th Century Ibn Khaldoon foretold of winners and losers being one and the same thing. In his *Muqaddimah*, he observed that great empires are overrun by nomadic tribes that still possess *asabiyyah*, the Bedouin ethos of endurance, strength, and group cohesion. The new rulers, in their turn, succumb to luxury and are overrun by more vigorous tribes living along their peripheries.[31] Perhaps the Abraj luxury tower, overlooking a sea of pilgrims, foretells of a similar passage. But if Empire is indeed the terminal civilization, then the evidence for the future is discouraging. The Abraj towers indicate the loss of the symbolic vertical pole, paralleled only by the loss of the environmental North Pole. The two events, different though they are, point to

29 Richard Waite: "Foster and Hadid to Redesign Mecca," *AJ, The Architect's Journal*, 26 November, 2008, http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/foster-and-hadid-to-redesign-mecca/1935469. article, (accessed June 28, 2009).

30 Saudi Binladin Group, http://www.sbgpbad.ae/default.asp?action=article&ID=3 (accessed July 8, 2009).

31 known in the West as the Prolegomena, and considered today to be the first work of cultural history, sociology, and perhaps economics. Ibn Khaldun: *The Muqaddimah: an Introduction to History*. trans Franz Rosenthal. Ed N. J. Dawood. (Princeton, Bollingen Series, 1967).

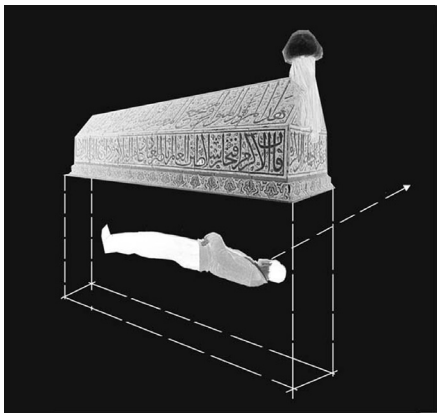

Fig. 8: underground eyes.

gether to a radical and permanent change in our sense of ourselves as oriented, spatial beings.[32]

The multitude, with its dream of liberation, enters into this volatile mix of monuments, politics, and religion. The agent of liberation, says Edward Said, "has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamic of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant."[33] The millions of pilgrims circumambulating the *Kaaba* represent a cross-section of vast humanity, a microcosm that includes every form of pilgrimage, dislocation, immigration, homelessness, the destitute and the forgotten. But it remains to be seen if this cross section of mobile humanity is indeed the revolutionary nomadism that Hardt and Negri designate as the Multitude, the obverse side of Empire. It is tempting to imagine that the ethos of genuflection and pilgrimage can produce the diffuse and extensive network of free individuals to resist globalization. But this multitude is motivated by a traditionalist, patriarchal and conservative culture. Its circumambulation have hardly changed in 1400 years. The lifetime habits of sublimating the horizon, diverting the gaze, and striating the body lead to passivity in social and political matters. How else to explain the Abraj tower? The Syrian poet Adonis (pen name of Ali Ahmad Said) blames what he calls the 'double dependency' of Arab modernity: "a dependency on the past, to compensate for the lack of creative activity by remembering and reviving; and a dependency on the European-American West, to compensate for the failure to invent and innovate by intellectual and technical adaptation and borrowing.… In both cases there is an obliteration of personality."[34] On the other hand, the tent city of pilgrims represents an interplay of modularity/multiplicity at the scale of land that parallels the interplay of Empire/Multitude; the collective genuflections

32 On the significance of the north for orientation see Henry Corbin: *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, trans. Nancy Pearson (New Lebanon, NY: Omega, 1971), pp. 1–12.
33 Edward Said: *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. 332.
34 Adonis: *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, trans. Catherine Cobham (London: Saki Books 2003), p. 80.

aspire to a new equilibrium between the individual and the crowd, the singular and the multiple, the conservative and the progressive whose direction is hard to forecast once it joins other forces and other groupings. If the predicted passage to Multitude does take place, and Empire goes the way of earlier empires, we might someday look upon the Abraj with the same bemused bewilderment that we now reserve for Stalinist architecture--as a caricature of power in our times, and with relief at its passage. Likewise, the passage might restore our ritualistic body, at present so divided in its loyalties. It would redeem our horizontal dimension, our tangible and tactile ground plane.